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Does going green make us happy?

Disentangling when pro-environmental behavior enhances wellbeing

Steph Johnson Zawadzki, Linda Steg, & Thijs Bouman

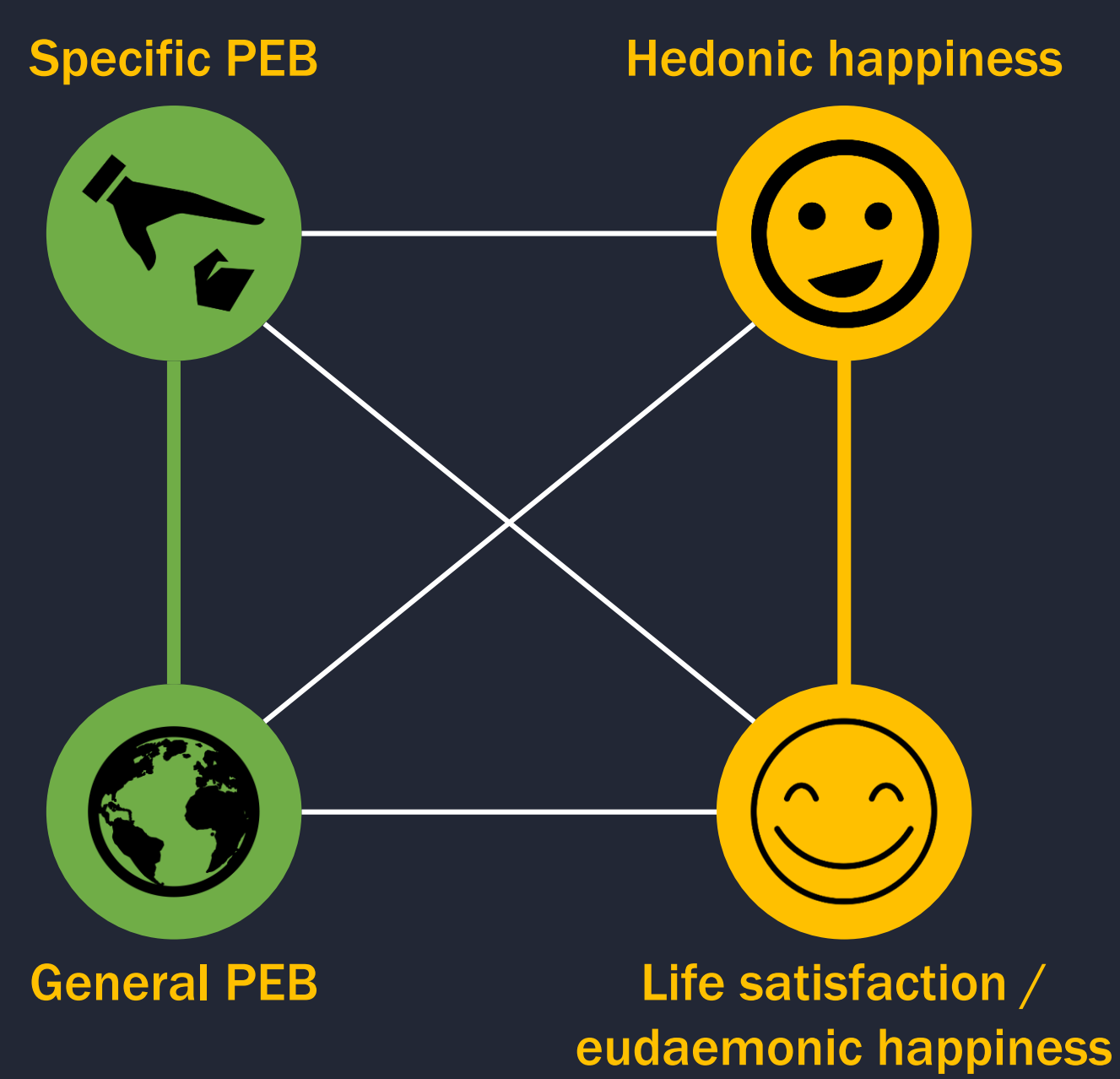
Acknowledgments: Special thanks to Vladimir Bojarskich & TJ Zawadzki for their assistance with data collection and processing

Summary & Conclusions

We studied the conditions under which pro-environmental behavior (PEB) and wellbeing are related. Unexpectedly, we did not find any meaningful relations between PEB and wellbeing in the 2017 European Social Survey. In an experimental study (N= 333), we aimed to study why this was the case. Half of the participants received filler questions between the key measures (replicating ESS 2017) and half did not. Additionally, half received the measures in the hypothesized order (PEB → wellbeing) and half in the opposite order (replicating ESS 2017). We included two types of PEB (i.e. specific versus general PEB), and three indicators of wellbeing (i.e. hedonic happiness, life satisfaction, and eudaemonic happiness). All participants completed both single-item measures (replicating ESS 2017) and full-scale measures.

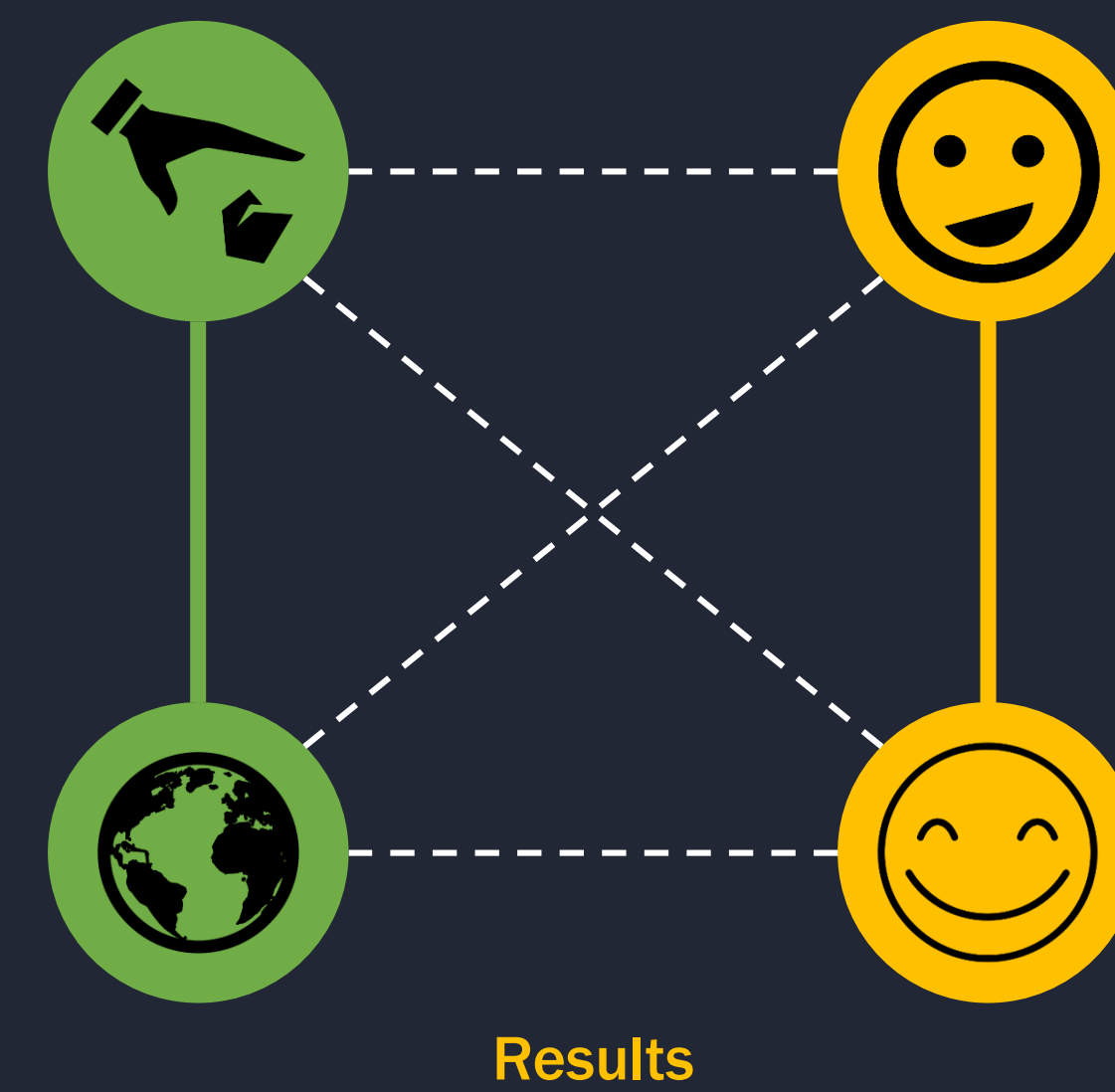
We found that the relation between performing a specific PEB and hedonic happiness is present only for participants who did not receive filler questions (regardless of question order). **The relation between specific PEBs and hedonic happiness seems more likely when participants are given a chance to reflect on the connection between their pro-environmental engagement and their happiness.** Future research will explore conditions that might strengthen this weak relation between specific PEBs and hedonic happiness, as well as identify specific psychological processes that may ultimately allow PEBs to contribute to deeper, long-term wellbeing.

Hypothesized Relations



Numerous studies have found a small positive association between PEB and wellbeing, both hedonic happiness^{1,2} and life satisfaction³⁻⁷. **We expected to find a similar pattern.** We also included eudaemonic happiness, as it may be key in long-term PEB, yet previously unexplored in the literature.

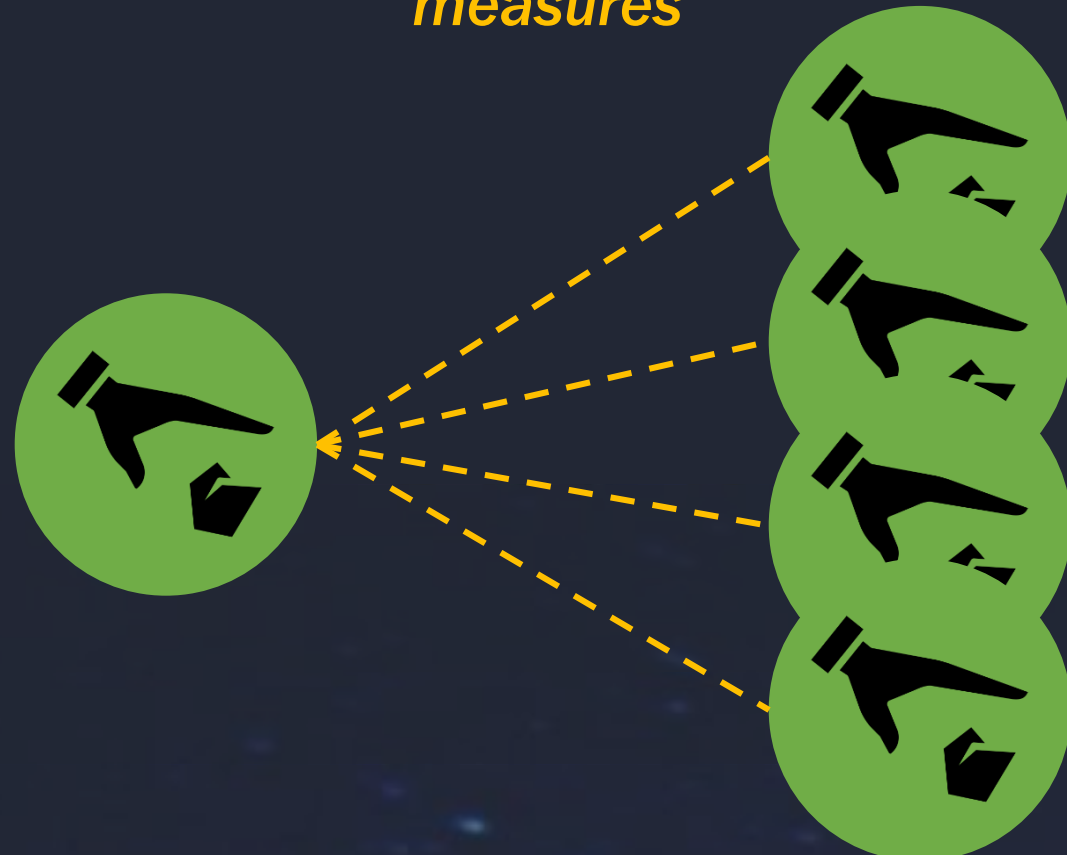
European Social Survey 2017 N = 17,609; 18 countries



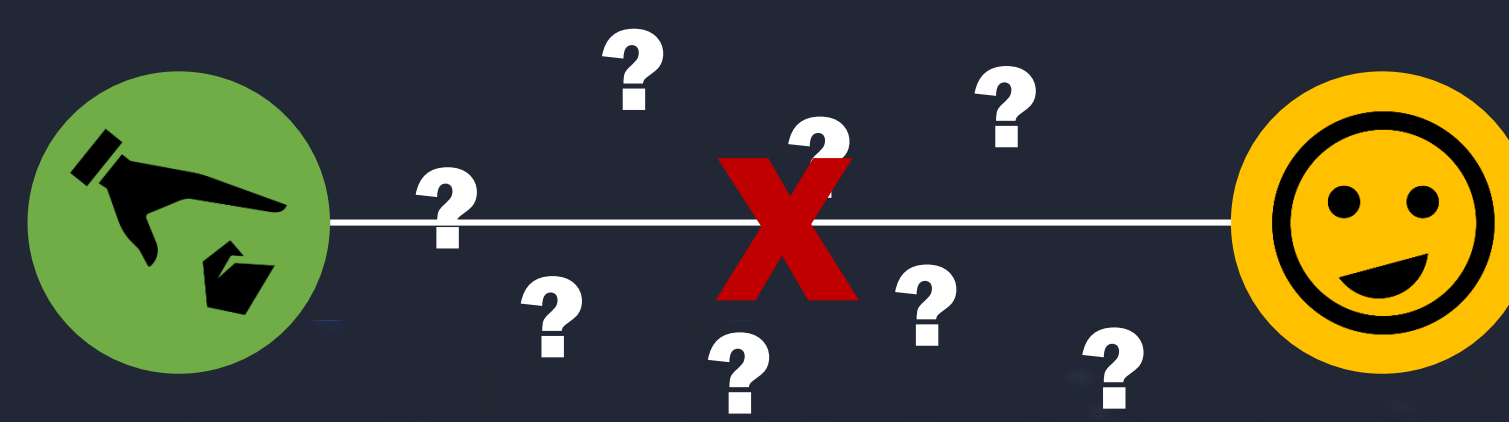
Nearly all relations examined were statistically significant. Yet, effect sizes were extremely small, **R² range: <.001 to .016**. Exploratory analyses revealed no significant moderators (e.g., biospheric values).

Possible methodological explanations for weak effect sizes

Single item measures less sensitive than full-scale measures



Filler items washed out effects



Questions asked in non-hypothesized order



Experimental Follow-up

333 participants completed both single-item measures and full scales of PEB and wellbeing

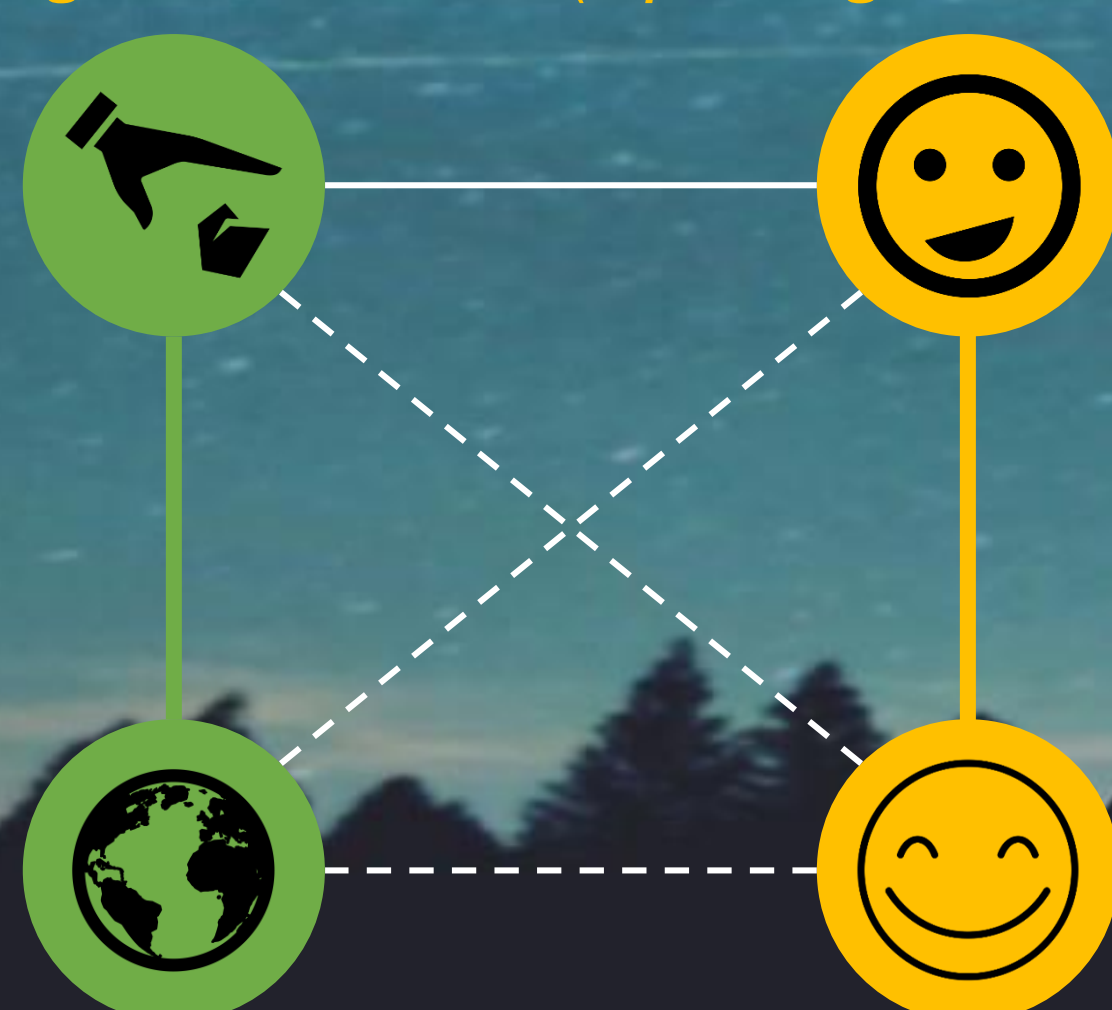


Participants were randomly assigned to 1 of 4 conditions in a 2(fillers: yes, no) X 2(order: PEB first, wellbeing first) between-subjects design



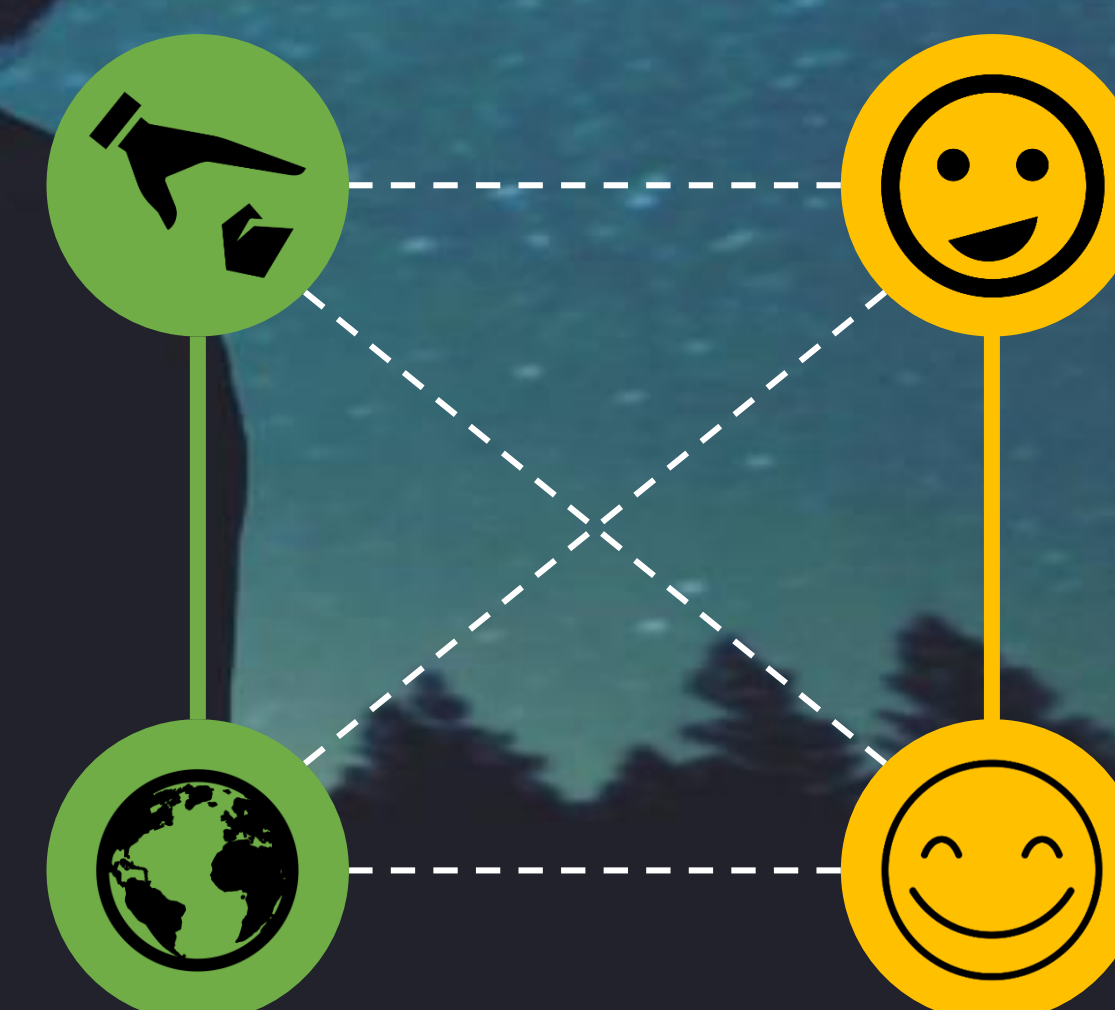
Preliminary Results

Single-item measures (replicating ESS 2017)



Specific PEB was significantly positively associated with hedonic happiness only when participants did not receive filler items, $\beta = -.45$, $p = .039$. Once again, the effect was weak, $R^2 = .024$. No other significant relations found.

Full-scale measures



No significant relations found. Unfortunately, we were not yet able to analyze specific behaviors as scales due to their low reliability, Cronbach's $\alpha = .566$.